'Phone phreaks' steal millions in free calls

By LEN ACKLAND
Chicago Tribune Service

"Sometimes I feel like a thief," said the Baltimore college student. "But it's not like I'm ripping off a little old lady out there."

He is a computer enthusiast known as a "phone phreak," one who specializes in stealing long-distance telephone service, an act he rationalizes by claiming that American Telephone & Telegraph Co., MCI Communications Corp. and other telecommunications companies can "write off their losses."

AT&T, the nation's largest phone company, estimates this computerized fraud on the Bell System amounted to $9 million last year, and MCI puts its annual loss at $5 million. Many firms refuse to provide details.

Although computer fraud is small compared with the $73 million in credit card or third-party billing fraud against AT&T last year and equals less than 1 percent of MCI's revenues, it is not ignored.

"THEFT IS THEFT," said MCI spokesman Gary Tobin, who is infuriated by phone phreaks' arguments that they are not hurting anyone. "In my mind, I can better justify someone stealing a loaf of bread to feed his family.

"It is frightening to see this fraud, because the whole world is going to be computerized, and this shows a lack of ethics," Tobin said.

Company officials say they vigorously pursue offenders, but they decline to provide numbers. Last year, the FBI investigated 3,755 wire-fraud cases nationwide, resulting in 525 convictions, according to agency statistics. During the first nine months of this year, 432 convictions were obtained.

Despite the prosecutions, the fraud continues.

"THERE IS MORE of this going on all the time," a company executive said. "Maybe it's because of the glorification of people trying to beat the system, like in 'War Games.'"

The element of challenge has been part of phone phreaking since the phrase came into being during the 1960s, when some people began developing "blue boxes" and other technology to exploit the computerized AT&T long-distance network. But home computers have simplified phone fraud considerably since the days when one blind man used his perfect pitch to whistle tones needed to enter phone company computers.

"It's very simple to hack out codes, if you know the tricks," said the college student, who agreed to talk about the subject in exchange for anonymity.

He said that although he could be considered a computer "hacker," he generally limits his manipulation of computers to the ones operated by phone companies. "I've never broken into banks or anything like that. It's too dangerous."

MA BELL WAS the original target for phone fraud, but the field has expanded in recent years with the cut-rate long distance services offered by MCI, Southern Pacific Communications' Sprint, Western Union's Metrophone and others.

Most of these services operate by having computer telephone switches in numerous locales connected to a nationwide network that can include transmissions over phone lines, microwave, satellites or any combination of the three.

To get into a network, a customer typically dials a local phone number for the computer switch. When the connection is made, the switch emits a tone and the customer punches in

(See *PHREAK, page 15)

— Photo by Dispatch Correspondent Mary Otto

Festival singers

Four students from Winola Junior High School in New Windsor were selected to sing at the recent Illinois Music Educators Association District Festival at Rock Island High School. Practicing their selection, 'Song of Praise,' are: from left, Jennifer Gregg, 13, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gary Gregg; Angie Chapman, 13, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hollace Chapman; Douglas Woolam, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Palmer, and Brooke Shaw, 13, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jess Shaw, all of Viola.

5 years later, S.F. murders, Jonestown cases linger

By JOHN M. LEIGHTY
United Press International

SAN FRANCISCO — Legal cases linger on a half decade after San Francisco was shocked by the mass suicides of Jim Jones' Peoples Temple and the slaying of the city's mayor and a city supervisor.

On Nov. 18, 1978, the Rev. Jones, a former San Francisco Housing Commissioner, and 912 cultists were shot or drank poison in Guyana after the jungle airport slayings of Rep. Leo Ryan, D-Calif., and four others who had flown to there to investigate the religious group.

It was the end for Jones' Peoples Temple, a cult that had built up political clout in California and whose members even canvassed for the election of George Moscone as San Francisco mayor.

Within two weeks of the Guyana horror, Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk were slain in their City Hall offices by former policeman Dan White, later convicted of manslaughter in a jury verdict which caused a riot on the streets.

THE UNRELATED twin tragedies left the city in shock and mourning. Flags flew at half staff. There were memorial services and candlelight vigils.

Five years later the ghosts of both cases are still present in San Francisco, where the Peoples Temple was headquartered and where Moscone and Milk were popular politicians.

Although the $9.5 million in Temple assets have finally been distributed to 75 claimants — survivors and their families — there is still the unanswered question of how much the U.S. government was involved with the commune of Jonestown.

A suit dismissed on a technicality by the Supreme Court last month charged that mind-controlling drugs were experimented with at the Guyana compound with the "consent, knowledge and aid" of the Central Intelligence Agency. The $65 million lawsuit had filed in San Francisco federal court by several survivors of the Guyana bloodbath.

Larry Layton, a temple aide, still faces a possible second murder-conspiracy trial for the jungle airstrip attack on Ryan, the event which triggered the mass suicide of the cult at Jones' orders. Layton's first trial ended in deadlock in 1981.

Prosecution material banned from the first trial, including "last hour" video tapes of Jones, will be permitted as evidence at the new proceeding under a ruling by an federal appeals court.

THE DEFENSE, on the other hand, has failed in numerous attempts to obtain classified government documents pertaining to Jonestown, where they said the CIA condoned "mind control" experiments using drugs and other techniques.

Layton's attorney Tony Tamburello said if the prosecution entered the "last hour" tapes as evidence, the defense should be allowed to unseal government documents pertaining to Jonestown.

"We still feel strongly that the government knew way ahead of time that bad things were happening in Jonestown and failed to act properly," said Tamburello.

THE CASE OF Dan White has also re-emerged in the legal arena.

White, whose "Twinkie defense" got him a relatively light manslaughter conviction when attorneys argued that he had been under severe pressures and was living on junk food prior to the killings, is due for parole in January.

He could, however, be re-prosecuted under federal civil rights laws for assassinating a person seeking political office. Both Moscone and Milk had re-filed for election just prior to their slayings.

A decision on whether to order such a federal trial — requested by Gov. George Deukmejian and San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein among others — is in the hands of U.S. Attorney General William French Smith.

— Dispatchphoto by Adell Specht

Van for Winning Wheels

Don Robinson, Prophetstown car dealer, turns over the keys to a new van to Paul 'Doc' Yackley, adminstrator of Winning Wheels. The van will replace a 1972 van and will be used to transport Winning Wheels residents to school, doctors, and the hospital. Yackley said the center for disabled adults is holding a cash raffle with prizes of $500, $300, and $200 to raise money for the van. Tickets sell for $1 each or six for $5. The van will cost $18,000 and will be equipped with a wheelchair lift, tie-downs, raised roof and doorway. Donations for the van have topped the halfway mark, Yackley said.

Scholastic recognition

Northern Illinois U.

Eight students from this area were awarded degrees by Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, at August commencement ceremonies.

Awarded graduate degrees were Timothy James DePooter (M.S.Ed.) and Pamela Marie Leoni-Rittof, (M.A.), both of Rock Island, and Sandra Wilkens (M.S.Ed.), Morrison.

Graduates receiving bachelor degrees were Gregory Rhea Banse, Cambridge; Robert L. Guise, East Moline; Shaun Patrick Moores, Milan; Philip James Dabney and Cynthia Ann Watson, both of Moline, and Donald George Kilroy, Port Byron.

License to wed

Laverne J. White, Rock Island, and Cheryl L. Lambert, Rock Island.

Laurence A. Holland, Costa Mesa, Calif., and Victoria L. Stamos, Moline.

Troy F. Bland, Rock Island, and Colette Williams, Rock Island.

William J. Gilbert, Port Byron, and Kimberly S. Coe, Port Byron.

Duane A. Otto Jr., Rock Island, and Marcia E. Covemaker, East Moline.

Insecticides: *Stringent testing makes most products safe for all*

By LISANNE RENNER
Orlando Sentinel

In the battle against bugs, some people wonder if they're making an unhealthy trade-off: They don't like spraying poison in their home, but they prefer poison to bugs.

Fears about the long-term effects of bug sprays are generally unfounded, say toxicologists and entomologists, and insecticides properly applied are usually safe around children and pets, although precautions should be taken.

Nevertheless, the environmental movement and heightened concern for health have made people more suspicious of the chemicals sprayed in their home, just as they worry about pesticides used in agriculture and chemicals in processed foods. Researchers are constantly looking for natural bug poisons and repellents — bay leaves and cucumbers to repel roaches, for example — that people will feel safe using.

INSECTICIDES' reputation has been tainted partly because of chemicals such as chlordane, a common roach insecticide sprayed in thousands of Florida homes in the 1950s and later found to be carcinogenic. Although the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned chlordane in 1975, the chemical still lingers in older homes, though not at toxic levels.

Today, insecticides must pass more stringent approval requirements than in the days when chlordane was first used. Scientists say it is extremely unlikely that a home insecticide used today would later be found dangerous.

"The chemicals we have for use inside the house have never been shown to cause cancer or birth defects, so from that point we feel we have very safe materials," says Philip Koehler, an extension entomologist and University of Florida professor in Gainesville.

But even the stringent chemical testing is suspect because of incidents of testing fraud. Officials feared a public health disaster in 1976 when a major commercial laboratory falsified data from pesticide safety tests and its sloppy procedures were discovered. More than 200 pesticides had received federal approval on the basis of bogus data from Industrial Bio-Test Laboratories in Northbrook — household chemicals Baygon and diazinon among them. Only this past summer did officials announce that most of the pesticides — including Baygon and diazinon — are still considered safe because chemical companies have provided test results from other labs to replace the faulty data.

Approved insecticides that may be carcinogenic or pose other hazards are reviewed by the Environmental Protection Agency when they are targeted by organizations such as the National Cancer Institute. "There are several products that have new data that show they may cause cancer," says Koehler. "The data against them is very weak, so they haven't been suspended" from use. Of these pesticides, piperonyl butoxide is found in some household aerosol sprays for flying insects and DDVP is found in some aerosol roach sprays.

BUT THE COMMON household insecticides such as Dursban, diazinon and Baygon have been reliably tested and don't linger for a long time, the way such chemicals as chlordane do. "Most of the chemicals break down very rapidly and they're not stored in the body, so the chances of poisoning are very remote," says John Mulrennar Jr., entomology director at the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) office in Jacksonville, Fla. "Most of the chemicals they use now for rach conto will baey give yua month's ontrol — they break down that rapidly."

The main hazard with household insecticides is their improper application, officials and industry representatives agree.

Because the effect of poisons is related to body weight, "you have to take more precautions with children," especially preschoolers, says Koehler. Young children should be out of the house while the insecticides are being sprayed, and the children should be kept off sprayed surfaces until the surfaces are dry, he recommends, adding that "we have not had any problem with children contacting sprayed surfaces and being poisoned — ever."

Taking a more cautious approach, University of Kentucky toxicologist H.W. Dorough says it is not a good idea to spray homes at all where infants crawl around the floor. "It would take an extremely bad infestation to make me want to spray my home with an infant in there," says Dorough.

PEST-CONTROL companies usually apply spray in cracks, safely away from children and pets, says Paul Meyers, a supervisor at Meyers Pest Control in Orlando, Fla. Chemical doses needed to kill roaches — which may weigh 1 gram each — are not potent enough to harm small pets or children, which may weigh several pounds or more, says Meyers. "The risk of accidential poisoning is zero," he says. He doesn't think it is necessary to put children outside while a house is being sprayed, but "if someone is concerned enough, go ahead and take that precaution," he says.

A "small percentage" of people may have allergic reactions to insecticides, ranging from minor illnesses to serious debilitation, says James Roelofs of the EPA's pesticide division. Symptoms could include dizziness, headaches, nausea and difficulty breathing.

Some of these symptoms, especially headaches, could be caused not by the insecticide itself but by the petroleum distillate mixed with the insecticide, says toxicologist Dorough. Most insecticides are petroleum-based.

Pets are usually safe from insecticides applied in the proper strength, but they can become ill or even die if a homeowner douses a home, lawn and pet with insecticides all at once. Cats are especially susceptible.

"WE HAVE seen cases where pet owners have a bad flea problem and they're going to wage an all-out war on the fleas. They spray the yard and home with organophosphate (an insecticide) and also put it on the pet. They also use carbamate an insecticide and the pet can have a toxic reaction," says Marc Hall, president of the Central Florida Veterinary Medical Association. If pet owners treat their home and lawn with pesticides, they should consult their veterinarian to make sure that the pesticides are compatible with any other pesticides being used directly on the pet, Hall says.

The roach-killing boric-acid powder that some people sprinkle around cupboards and closets as an alternative to sprays ironically can be more harmful than sprays, says toxicologist Dorough. If swallowed, boric acid can seriously damage a pet's kidneys.

If a pet is poisoned, symptoms could include vomiting, diarrhea, excessive salivation, difficulty in breathing and constricted pupils.

Chemicals used on lawns — diazinon is the most common — are more potent than indoor insecticides, and the potential for pet poisonings are greater, says Dorough. Directions for most lawn pesticides say to water the lawn well after applying the pesticide and then to let the lawn dry before allowing pets and children on the lawn.

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